

## SECTION 10 OUTDOOR RECREATION

### GOAL: Connect people to nature.

- Enhance opportunities for watershed residents, children, and tourists to enjoy the region's rivers, lakes, and wetlands by protecting scenic vistas, revitalizing waterfronts, promoting outdoor recreation, and providing additional opportunities for water-based recreation.

### CHALLENGE

It is hard to imagine a better place to promote outdoor activities than the Susquehanna and Chemung River Watersheds. The availability of recreation opportunities is abundant with the rolling hills, scenic drives and, of course, rivers running through the land. Yet there appears to be a disconnect between the opportunities available and recreational use of the land and water.

There are many reasons for this disconnect. For many, it is simply the lack of knowledge about outdoor recreation opportunities and sites in their own neighborhoods. Many access points are under publicized. Residents may not know where a trailhead begins or where a canoe can be rented. This information is disseminated primarily by word of mouth and deeply buried web pages.



Photo by Janet Thigpen.

A New York State survey indicates that for the age group from 35 to 44 years, the biggest impediment to outdoor recreation is time. Younger adults (20 to 34 years old) also state that lack of time is a strong impediment (NYS OPRHP, 2008). These statistics suggest that outdoor recreation facilities are used primarily by children, teenagers, and those over the age of 44. Recreational programs, information, and amenities could be targeted at these age groups.

A priority in the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan (NYS DEC & OPRHP, 2009) is “connecting our children with nature.” Today’s children spend far less time outdoors than did their parents. As a result they are learning about nature indirectly from television and the internet, rather than directly from contact and observation. In order to reverse this shift away from outdoor activities, the Open Space Plan recommends a number of actions to reverse that trend by helping children and their families rediscover the natural world.

Areas near the water are ideal for recreational facilities, which typically have less impact on water quality and lower vulnerability to flood damage than other uses. The chart on the following page identifies some of the requirements and amenities that support outdoor activities on the water, near the water, and throughout the watershed. The Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed has an abundance of publicly-owned land and many delightful recreational facilities, including trails, boat launches, and picnic areas. Recreational opportunities could be enhanced by more sites with simple access to the water and safe parking. In a 2011 survey for the Town of Vestal Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), 40% of respondents indicated that lack of parking would prohibit them from participating in river related activities. Some outdoor activities also require equipment (such as boats, camping gear, cross country skis, fishing poles, etc.) which can be expensive to own, but very affordable to rent. The Town of Vestal LWRP survey found that over half of those surveyed wished to see more “water related equipment, instruction and rental businesses” and restaurants. Increased promotion of outdoor recreation should be accompanied by economic development strategies that include the addition of outdoor retail stores, as well as rental and shuttle services.

## Ammenities and Requirements for Outdoor Recreation

		<i>Public Access / Parking</i>	<i>Clean Water</i>	<i>Park/ Tables / Seating / Pavillion</i>	<i>Boat Launch</i>	<i>Swimming Area / Life Gaurds</i>	<i>Multi-Use Trail</i>	<i>Camp Sites</i>	<i>Ski Resort</i>	<i>Golf Course</i>	<i>Scenic Byway</i>	<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Restrooms</i>	<i>Knowledge of Location</i>	<i>Signage/ Markers/ Maps</i>	
<b>On the Water</b>																
Boating			R	R	R								R	R	R	R
Fishing	R		R	R									R	R	R	R
Swimming*			R	R		R							R	R	R	
<b>Near the Water</b>																
Walking	R			R			R						R	R	R	
Biking				R			R				R	R	R	R	R	R
Cross Country Skiing				R			R					R	R	R	R	
Birdwatching/ Wildlife Observation	R	R		R									R	R	R	
Picnicking	R			R									R	R		
<b>In the Watershed</b>																
Camping	R			R				R					R	R	R	
Hunting	R												R	R	R	
Skiing (downhill)	R			R					R				R	R	R	
Golfing	R			R						R			R	R	R	
Sightseeing / Historic Sites				R							R		R	R	R	

\*Rivers are not safe for swimming due to currents and debris.

Although the watershed has many places to enjoy the great outdoors, the resources needed to maintain trails, parks, and other facilities are often lacking. Recreational facilities are often low priorities for tight municipal, state, and federal budgets. Many volunteer groups of recreational enthusiasts are being tasked with maintaining trail systems, mowing lawns around launch site, and simply keeping these sites available to the public. It is difficult to recruit these folks and even more difficult to find funding to maintain recreational facilities. An additional concern is the lack of insurance coverage for “work parties” and other volunteer activities. Organizations with the best of intentions are often thwarted by liability concerns and red-tape.

Safety considerations must be incorporated into all programs that support outdoor recreation. The lack of knowledge about opportunities for outdoor activities goes hand-in-hand with a lack of experience and knowledge about how to undertake those activities safely. Many people underestimate the hazards of recreation on and near water. Programs that promote water-based recreation must also promote the use of life jackets, discourage swimming in rivers, and discourage consumption of alcohol while boating.

#### Why is outdoor recreation important?

The New York State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (NYS OPRHP, 2008) states the following:

- 24% of adult Americans get no exercise
- 60% of NYS adults are overweight or obese
- Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past 30 years
- Obesity-related illnesses cost the state more than \$7.6 billion per year
- Children spend half as much time outdoors as they did 20 years ago
- One third of New York’s children are obese or overweight
- There is a growing “nature deficit disorder”

The nation’s obesity and public health problems led the First Lady, Michelle Obama, to make combating childhood obesity one of her top priorities. Outdoor activities can be an important part of the solution, providing enjoyable, low-cost ways to stay in shape and reduce stress. Almost all of us can benefit from a walk in the woods and the beauty of an unspoiled view.

Furthermore, recreation provides economic benefits to the local economy. Hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation contributes more than \$6 billion to the New York economy annually, and are important components of the tourism economy in the Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed. Trail users spend an average of \$342 per year on equipment for trail activities. About 86% of trail users are local people who live within 20 miles and spend an average of \$10 per visit. The other 14% have come from farther away and spend an average of \$180 per trail visit (NYS OPRHP, 2008). Trails and other recreational facilities are thus an important element of a sustainable local economy.

***“When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods:  
What would become of us if we walked only in a garden or mall?”  
- Henry David Thoreau***

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**On the Water: Provide public access to lakes, rivers, and streams to facilitate safe use of these waters for boating, fishing, and other recreation.**

10a. Revitalize existing sites and build additional boat launches to establish a network that supports short and long excursions, with safe parking and signage at each site that can be seen from the closest road.

Immediate action: Revitalize existing boat launches by updating amenities, improving signage, maintaining vegetation, and making other improvements.

**5-year target:** Conduct a full assessment of all boat launch sites within the watershed to determine ownership/responsibility, assess hazards, document facility needs (including rest rooms), and identify gaps where additional boat launches are desired. Address any dangerous situations immediately. Seek sponsors and funding for other needs.

**5-year target:** Develop a water recreation park at the Rock Bottom dam in Binghamton and/or at the Chase-Hibbard dam in Elmira (such as the one in Watertown).

**Measure:** *Number of boat launches revitalized.*



Chemung River Float (by Noel Sylvester).

- 10b. Provide water safety information (such as the River and Boating Safety brochure developed by Environmental Emergency Services) at all boat launches within the watershed and a safety briefing prior to each organized trip.

**Immediate action:** Place pamphlets and/or signs at each boat launch to communicate relevant safety information, such as: prohibiting swimming in unsafe locations, urging boaters to wear (and fasten) life jackets, providing information about NYS boating laws, alerting users to local hazards, providing emergency contacts, or conveying other water safety messages.

**Measure:** *Number of boat launches with water safety information.*

**Near the Water:** Provide an interconnected system of marked, maintained, and accessible trails that enable walking, biking, and cross country skiing along and between the region's waterways.

- 10c. Implement existing plans for riverside trail systems and amenities, such as the Southeast Steuben River Vision, Chemung County River Trail Master Plan, Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans, Susquehanna Greenway plan, trail components of transportation plans, and the NYS Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Include all trails in the statewide Trail Finder site.<sup>16</sup>

**Immediate action:** Pursue funding to implement recommendations from existing plans, with emphasis on projects that connect existing trails.

**Immediate action:** Add trails to statewide Trail Finder website. Promote the expansion of the NYS Department of Transportation 511NY.org website to include trails.

**Measure:** *Number of waterside trail projects implemented. Number of trails in the Trail Finder site.*

- 10d. Implement tangible projects that enhance the "Quality of Place" and build support for resource protection by providing access to natural resources and facilitating outdoor recreation. Possible projects include creation, revitalization, or improved signage for: parks, picnic facilities, public access points (with parking), fishing access sites, recreation areas, trails, etc.

**5-year target:** Create or revitalize outdoor recreation facilities.

**Measure:** *Number of projects.*

- 10e. Recognizing that the watershed does not end at the state line, work with Pennsylvania agencies to interconnect water and land trail systems in New York with those in Pennsylvania.

<sup>16</sup> New York State Trail Finder site: [www.ptny.org/Trailfinder.org/wp](http://www.ptny.org/Trailfinder.org/wp)

Immediate action: Increase cooperation and communication with Pennsylvania agencies and outdoor recreation groups through inclusion on currently existing lists (such as BACPAC group, STC newsletter list, Chemung River Friends list, etc.) and invitations to relevant meetings and events.

5-year target: Work with recreation groups in Pennsylvania to identify land and water trails that could connect across the state line and complete those trail connections (with amenities and signage as needed).

*Measure: Number of trails connected across state lines.*

- 10f. Support existing community groups and volunteers that maintain trails and recreational facilities. Solicit additional participation as warranted.

Immediate action: Sponsor social networking events that bring together existing volunteers and professionals from throughout the watershed for sharing of ideas, building partnerships and providing technical support about funding resources. Always provide food at these events.

Immediate action: Pursue an intern position or other funding to develop a volunteer recruitment program that will enable a sustainable network of volunteers to maintain and promote trails and other facilities (from recreation groups, local colleges, high schools, boy scouts, girl scouts, YMCAs, etc.).

5-year target: Create and publish an online mechanism for outdoor recreation enthusiasts to network and schedule group outings. Include groupings for different types of activities (i.e. paddling, hunting, hiking, fishing) with message boards where individuals can announce a trip and invite others to join.

*Measure: Number of networking events. Number of volunteer organizations that maintain and promote trails.*

**In the Watershed: Promote and support businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other groups that facilitate outdoor recreational opportunities.** These partners sell and rent equipment, provide shuttle services, provide training, construct and maintain facilities, promote healthy lifestyles, publish maps, etc.

- 10g. Integrate outdoor recreation into economic development plans as a viable part of the business sector. Support existing outdoor recreation businesses and encourage their expansion.

Immediate action: Work with existing outdoor-related businesses to encourage expansion of services to include additional equipment rental, shuttle services, and an increased variety of merchandise.

Immediate action: Assist new and existing businesses by providing them with a list of community outdoor recreation groups that they could reach out to with presentations, training, or promotional sales.

Immediate action: Businesses offer training and education to the public on the use of equipment and safety for the types of merchandise the businesses sell and rent.

5-year target: Work with local economic development agencies to establish new outdoor-related businesses.

*Measure: Number of businesses that receive assistance or information. Number of business-sponsored public presentations. Number of new outdoor-related businesses established.*

- 10h. Identify funding opportunities that support outdoor recreation objectives and provide interested groups with the assistance needed to access those resources.

Immediate action: Lobby to re-fund programs that benefit outdoor recreation and work to make that funding accessible to local non-profit organizations, municipalities, and others.

Immediate action: Identify funding for maintenance or improvement of outdoor recreation facilities and notify eligible applicants, such as municipalities, non-profit organizations, and recreation groups.

Immediate action: Host grant writing training targeted at volunteer organizations.

5-year target: Create an umbrella state-wide organization, modeled after Pennsylvania Organization for Waters and Rivers (POWR) or Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation, that provides assistance with volunteer recruitment and retention, insurance coverage, and fundraising for stewardship and promotion of recreational facilities. This group could also maintain and organize online resources.

*Measure: Number of letters or expressions of support for funding. Number of grant writing training sessions. Establishment of a program to support volunteer organizations.*

- 10i. Encourage golf courses and other recreational businesses (as well as other water users) to use water efficiently and provide for local mitigation for water used during low flow conditions.<sup>17</sup> (Other water conservation recommendations are in Section 1.)

Immediate action: In conjunction with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC), educate the operators of golf courses about sustainable water management practices, encouraging the development of drought management plans and implementation of water conservation and mitigation measures that exceed permit requirements.

*Measure: Number of golf courses receiving information or assistance.*

**Publicity, Education, and Outreach: Provide residents and visitors with information about the region's recreational assets and how to enjoy them safely.** (Additional tourism recommendations are in Section 2.)

- 10j. Map the recreational resources of the Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed. Provide maps in different formats and for different types of activities so that residents and visitors can identify recreational opportunities and find the locations for taking advantage of them.

Immediate action: Distribute existing maps of trails, launch sites, fishing access points, parks, etc; and encourage individuals to post pictures from their outings on Google maps and Bing Maps of the region.

Immediate action: Include public land, available hunting land, and outdoor recreation facilities in the online Susquehanna-Chemung Data Atlas,<sup>18</sup> with links to websites, maps, and other online resources.

5-year target: Develop comprehensive watershed-wide maps of boat launches, parks, restrooms, and other outdoor recreation amenities. Distribute this mapping in multiple formats, such as print, internet, and mobile phone. This could be paid for with grants, donations, and/or advertising.

*Measure: Number of new maps. Number of means for distributing maps.*

- 10k. Promote the region's recreational treasures.

Immediate action: Get trails published in hiking and biking trail guides (people use these!) and shown on road maps by providing information about routes and facilities to existing publications. Update and re-submit annually.

Immediate action: Work with New York State Parks and Trails to update, maintain, enhance, and promote their Trail Finder website.

Immediate action: Write articles and submit for publication in local and/or regional outdoor enthusiast publications.

Immediate action: Provide increased information about boat launches, fishing access sites, trails, and other recreational opportunities through county websites.

Immediate action: Conduct a regional "eco-recreational event" to get people outside and introduce them to a recreational gem somewhere in the watershed. Encourage the organization of additional

<sup>17</sup> Golf course irrigation can use large volumes of water, which is often withdrawn from small headwater drainage areas. In the Susquehanna Basin golf courses use more water than power plants and more than the anticipated water use for natural gas extraction, though less than 15% of those golf courses are in New York (SRBC, Dec. 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Susquehanna-Chemung Data Atlas: <http://24.97.219.74/SCAtlas/>

sojourns throughout the watershed and invite community leaders to participate in these events. Integrate geo-caching into these events and sojourns.

Immediate action: Reach out to sponsors of previous outdoor recreation events to build a regional network of businesses and organizations that can work together to promote outdoor recreation and support future projects and events.

Immediate action: Lobby New York State government to expand the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to better serve outdoor recreation groups and to assist with coordination of safety programs, facility upkeep, and promotion of outdoor recreation opportunities.

5-year target: Develop a water trail guide with a map of boat launch sites and additional information for river users (such as hazard areas, availability of services, road directions to access points, etc.). This collaborative project of the Headwaters River Trail Partnership and the Friends of the Chemung River Watershed will encompass the entire Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed in NY. Incorporate an online resource that indicates “navigable” water levels with links to current river gauge data.

5-year target: Seek funding to work with local economic development agencies and advertising firms to brand the Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed as a place to vacation.

*Measure: Number of articles, publications, and websites promoting outdoor recreation in the Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed. Number of “eco-recreational” events. Number of networking opportunities for outdoor recreation sponsors. Development of a “brand” for the Susquehanna-Chemung Watershed.*

#### 10l. Promote the pleasures and health benefits of outdoor activities.

Immediate action: Conduct a public relations campaign promoting the health benefits and joys of outdoor recreation, accompanied by specific information about local resources and special places. Promote this message at festivals, events, and publications throughout the watershed. Utilize schools, colleges, and senior centers to target those under 20 and over 44, who have time to go outside and enjoy themselves. This message can be revised and repeated every year.

Immediate action: Collaborate with local health professionals, planning departments and university programs (such as SUNY Cortland's Community Health and Outdoor Recreation program) to host trainings for community leaders (in the public and private sectors) about the importance of outdoor recreation and open space for the health benefits, economic possibilities, and overall “quality of place.”

Immediate action: Promote New York State's Junior Hunters and Trappers program and New York State Parks and Trails' “Healthy Trails, Healthy People” program throughout the watershed through the distribution of published information.

5-year target: Conduct focus groups to develop strategies for promoting outdoor recreation to under-represented demographics, with a strong emphasis on children and combining recreation with science education.

*Measure: Number of advertisements. Number of training events. Number of organizations that distribute published information. Number of focus group meetings.*

#### 10m. Promote and educate about water safety.

Immediate action: Distribute water safety publications to outdoor recreation groups, at local community organizations, and local community functions.

Immediate action: Develop a water safety webpage and encourage outdoor recreation groups, municipalities, and businesses to link to this information from their websites.

Immediate action: Seek funding for signs indicating that rivers are not safe places to swim and post at appropriate public access sites.

Immediate action: Distribute and publish information about water safety, boating safety classes (offered by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary), and learn to swim clinics.

5-year target: Establish sign-in/sign-out registers at all boat launches and trail heads, to enable verification that users have safely completed their excursions.

*Measure: Number of organizations that distribute information. Development of a water safety webpage. Number of water safety signs. Number of boat launches and trail heads equipped with sign-in/sign-out registers.*

10n. Recognize that development within the watershed and near the water has direct impacts on recreational use of the rivers.

Immediate action: Provide the Susquehanna River Basin Commission with information about river trails, fishing access sites, and other amenities so that recreational water uses are considered during the project review process for water withdraw permits.

Immediate action: Train and educate public officials and municipal planning boards about the benefits of preserving riparian buffers through regional training and distribution of printed materials.

*Measured: Number of training sessions.*